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House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. PASTOR).

DESIGNATION OF THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,

February 28, 2007.

I hereby appoint the Honorable ED PASTOR to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NANCY PELOSI,

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

PRAYER

The Reverend Tyrone Skinner, Pastor, Metropolitan Baptist Church, Altadena, California, offered the following prayer:

Dear gracious God our savior, we spend these moments reverencing You as we invoke Your presence in this place so that sound judicious decisions will be made that will benefit our democracy. We admit our shortcomings and our need for Your guidance in all that is done in this place.

We seek Your face to address racism, classism, sexism, and other discriminations that divide us and seek to devour the very core of our democracy. We lift especially the victims of Katrina and other natural disasters in our country that they may find peace and resolution to the quest for placement that should be theirs.

Finally, we pray for our troops who fight for the cause of democracy in Iraq. We know You will not allow their fighting to be in vain. Thank you for hearing our prayer, and we now listen for Your voice to direct our paths.

In the name of Him who has been given all power. Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the

last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. BILIRAKIS led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

INTRODUCTION OF REV. TYRONE SKINNER, GUEST CHAPLAIN

(Mr. SCHIFF asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Reverend Tyrone Skinner of the Metropolitan Baptist Church in Altadena, California, as guest Chaplain of the House of Representatives.

Pastor Skinner embarked on his career as a preacher at a remarkably young age. He delivered his first public sermon at the age of 10. While at Bishop College in Dallas, Texas, in pursuit of his bachelor's degree, he joined the First Baptist Church of Hamilton Park. He earned his Master's of Divinity Degree from the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in 1989. One year later, he became pastor of Metropolitan Baptist Church.

Under Reverend Skinner's charismatic leadership, the Metropolitan Baptist Church has seen incredible transformations. Pastor Skinner has enriched the worship experience for 800 members and has overseen significant infrastructure improvements to the church facility. Pastor Skinner was in-

strumental in engaging church members in a Body and Soul program by serving as a judge at a men's cook-off and encouraging members to become more healthy physically as well as spiritually.

Pastor Skinner helped establish Praise Team, Praise Dancers, Soldiers for Christ Stomp Team, and several other ministries in the church. He also established a 501(c)3 nonprofit, the Metropolitan Community Action Services Corporation, which has been a sponsor of the Young African American Male Conference.

The list of Reverend Skinner's accomplishments is long, his altruism is broad. Last year, Metropolitan celebrated its 100th anniversary, and today is a fitting capstone to his service to the church, the community and now to the country.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair will entertain up to 15 one-minute speeches on each side.

ADMINISTRATION WANTS TO TALK TO IRAN WHILE PLANNING WAR

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, the administration now says it wants to talk to Iran. At the same time it is making plans to attack Iran. By saying it wants to talk to Iran and Syria, the administration appears to be reversing course after spending 2 months pumping the media full of anonymously sourced articles reporting to link Iran to the Iraq war.

Now it says it wants to talk. Making it appear that it wants to avoid another war. Right. Think about it. Aircraft carriers to the region, mine sweepers to the Persian Gulf, arming neighboring countries with Patriot missiles, ordering an increase in a

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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Strategic Petroleum Reserve, anticipating an oil embargo. When this administration puts the guns on the table and says let's talk, chances are it is going to shoot first and ask questions later, just like in Iraq.

Wake up, Congress. This administration is planning an attack on Iran with or without the permission of this House.

THE HURRICANE AND TORNADO MITIGATION INVESTMENT ACT

(Mr. BILIRAKIS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, my State of Florida is going through a crisis, a crisis that began with the devastating hurricanes that ripped through my State in recent years, a crisis made worse by the overwhelming tornados that plagued central Florida earlier this month.

These and other natural disasters have pushed homeowners' insurance rates to unaffordable levels. As a result, many of my constituents have been forced to leave the area they call home. It is incumbent upon this body to pass legislation that would help my State and others affected by these forces reduce the cost of skyrocketing homeowners' insurance rates.

I have introduced H.R. 913, the Hurricane and Tornado Mitigation Investment Act to do just that. My bill would provide tax incentives to home and business owners to better protect their homes and businesses from major storms to reduce the loss of innocent lives and destruction of private property. The end result would be more manageable insurance rates.

Mr. Speaker, hurricane season begins in a few months, but the tornados that hit my State are a stark reminder that Mother Nature doesn't keep a calendar. I encourage my colleagues to support and help me pass H.R. 913.

THE PRESIDENT'S BUDGET AND NATIONAL DEBT

(Mr. WALZ of Minnesota asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. WALZ of Minnesota. Mr. Speaker, President Bush recently released his seventh budget, and it is more of the same. The Bush administration's 2008 budget continues the same fiscal irresponsibility of the past 6 years, sending us spiraling ever further into debt while failing to address this Nation's critical issues.

During this administration and past Republican-led Congresses, they took a 10-year surplus of \$5.6 trillion left over from the Clinton administration and turned it into a \$3.2 trillion deficit that mortgages our children's future. Despite the President's continuous promise to balance the budget by 2012, the current budget gets us no closer.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is not only fiscally irresponsible, it is morally ir-

responsible. We should not be piling mounds of debt owed to foreign nations onto the backs of America's children, while giving massive tax cuts to the wealthiest few.

Democrats are working to restore fiscal responsibility, economic prosperity for all and pay-as-you-go policy to the Federal budget. It is time the President joined us. The American people already have.

CARD CHECK = PEER PRESSURE

(Mr. WILSON of South Carolina asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, tomorrow the House will consider the unfortunately named Employee Free Choice Act. Contrary to the title's implication, this bill will repeal employees' rights to hold secret ballot elections when deciding whether to form a union.

The so-called card check provision of the bill would force union membership by the signing of a form and thus denying employees having secret ballot elections. As citizens of a democratic Nation, Americans have the right to elect their public officials in secrecy and without coercion.

Republicans will fight to uphold a worker's rights by offering an alternative to this misguided legislation. This alternative, championed by the late Congressman Charlie Norwood, guarantees workers the right of a secret ballot election and prohibits anyone from coercively subjecting employees to a card check campaign.

In conclusion, God bless our troops, and we will never forget September 11.

BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S SPIN ON BRITISH TROOP WITHDRAWAL NOT HELPFUL FOR THE FUTURE

(Mr. HARE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. HARE. Mr. Speaker, last week British Prime Minister Tony Blair announced that he plans to withdraw 1,600 British troops this summer. The administration's response, this is good news, because it shows that some good things are happening in Iraq. Nice spin. But one has to wonder why our closest ally in this war is pulling out troops at the very same time this administration wants to send 21,500 additional U.S. soldiers into Iraq.

The British say they are withdrawing their troops because the Shiite-dominated southern region is relatively calm. That is, indeed, good news. But if the British really believed, as this President does, that expanding number of troops in Baghdad would lead to the same results there, wouldn't they choose to move these troops into Baghdad rather than pull them out completely?

No matter how the Bush administration tries to spin it, the British with-

drawal is not good news for the administration's troop escalation plan. Why should we be sending thousands more of our troops to Iraq when Britain and other coalition members are pulling out? It is time the administration stops spinning and instead answers these questions.

VETERANS ADMINISTRATION MISMANAGEMENT

(Mrs. BLACKBURN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor today with a heavy heart and a new set of questions for the bureaucracy here in Washington, DC. I am here because it appears that our veterans, who have been wounded and are in dire need of medical care, have received shamefully substandard care by the Veterans Administration, the agency charged with treating the veterans who have sacrificed their body and soul for our country, and they have fallen short of their mission.

Reports from our government audits, and, recently, the report here in Newsweek really shines the light on the travesty that is a bureaucratic boondoggle at the VA. Many men and women who were casualties of war, they are looking for help, they are either being given the bureaucratic run around or substandard care or housed in decrepit facilities, if they are lucky.

I have repeatedly voted to increase the VA funding. They have received a lot of money. They have got plenty of it, and I think it is disgraceful that our military, many severely injured, have received anything less than stellar health care from this agency. The executive branch, starting with the administration, has fallen short.

THE PRESIDENT'S BUDGET AND NATIONAL DEBT, TIME TO RESTORE FISCAL DISCIPLINE IN WASHINGTON

(Mr. KLEIN of Florida asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, the President's 2008 budget proposal does not properly address the concern of American families. President Bush once again proposes substantial cuts to programs so important to our districts like Medicare, Medicaid, education and the environment. He then uses those funds not to offset our country's massive debt, but instead to fund expensive tax cuts that do not grow our economy and give it to people who need it the least. Unfortunately, budgets like this are what we have come to expect from an administration with the worst financial fiscal record in our Nation's history.

During the 6 years of the Bush administration, the government has posted the highest deficits in history,